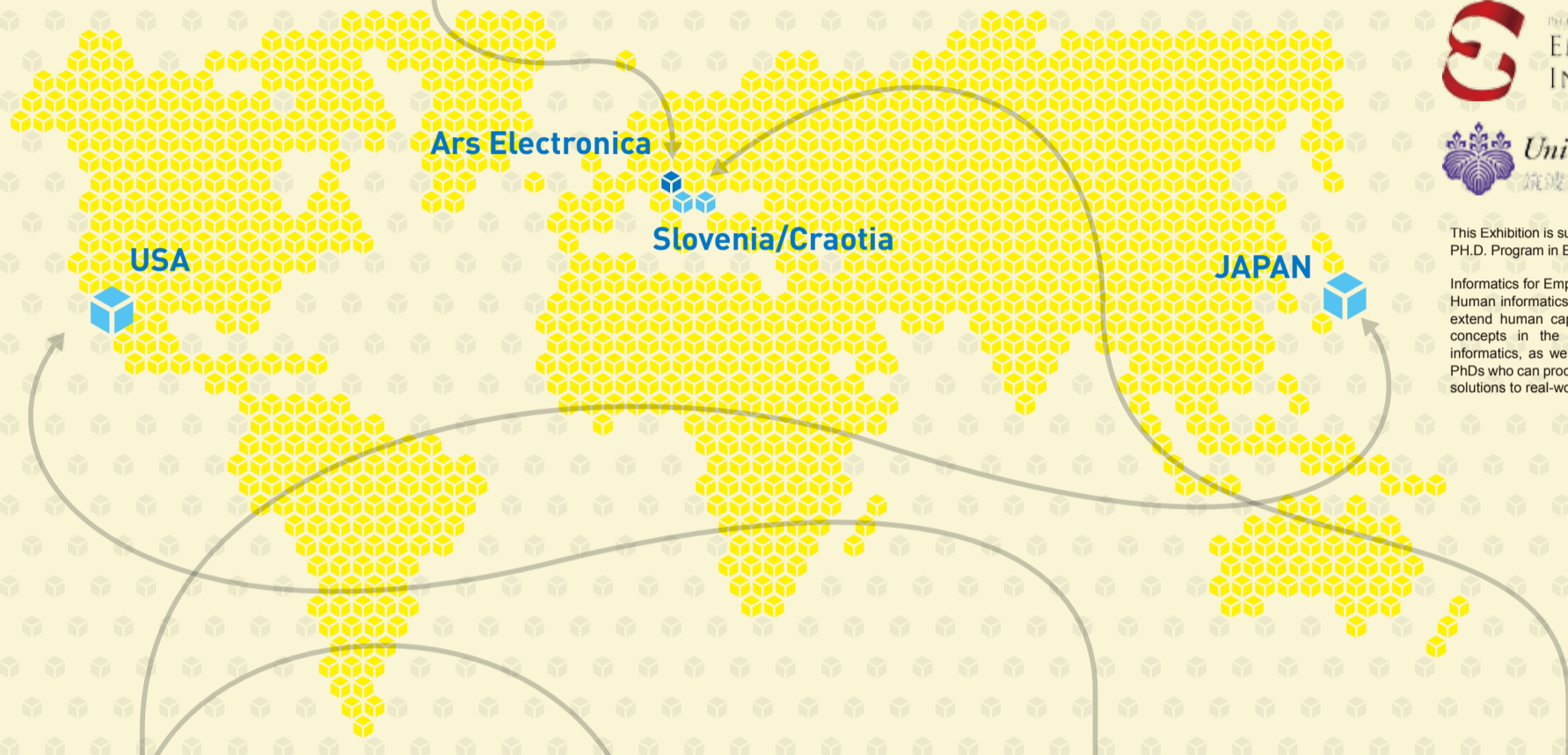


# DEVICE ART

## International Exhibition

 **Ars Electronica**  **4. September 2014 - 31. August 2015**



This Exhibition is supported by  
PH.D. Program in Empowerment Informatics

Informatics for Empowering People  
Human informatics that supplement, harmonize and extend human capabilities. These will be the key concepts in the study of Tsukuba-style human informatics, as we endeavor to nurture world-class PhDs who can produce innovative ideas while finding solutions to real-world issues on a global scale.

### Introduction of Device Art International Exhibition

Hiroo Iwata  
/ University of Tsukuba

### Device, Gadget, and Media Society

Machiko Kusahara  
/ Waseda University

### Device Art from UCLA, Design Media Arts

Erkki Huhtamo,  
UCLA

Eye tattoo, cloudy skies, vanishing images and a begging robot – Croatian and Slovenian Device\_art representatives  
Sunčica Ostoić, Kontejner

Device Art is a new form of art that displays the essence of technology through the use of new materials and mechatronic devices. This concept challenges the traditional paradigm of art by its convergence of technology, art and design. Device Art possesses three main characteristics:

- 1: The Device itself is content. The mechanism represents the theme of the piece. Content and tool are no longer separable.
- 2: Artworks are often playful and can sometimes be commercialized into devices or gadgets for use in everyday life.
- 3: Refined design and playful features are traced back to the Japanese tradition of appreciating tools and materials.

Traditional Japanese culture, such as tea ceremony or flower arrangement, uses sophisticated devices. These devices are the roots of device art. The Device Art project is funded by Core Research for Evolutional Science and Technology (CREST) of Japan Science and Technology Agency. Hiroo Iwata conducts the project, its formal title being, "Expressive Science and Technology for Device Art." The name and concept of Device Art came about during the process of its creation in 2004. This decade has shown world-wide trend in Device Art. Kontejner started exhibition named "device\_art" coincidentally in 2004. They exhibited device works of artists from Croatia and Slovene. Although "device\_art" started from independent concept, their works are technology oriented and playful. Further more, artists from ART|SCI Center of University of California Los Angeles have created works closely related to Device Art. Based on the world-wide trend, the Device Art International Exhibition in Ars Electronica 2014 has been planned for celebration of its 10th anniversary.

Device Art Project was launched in 2004 in Japan by a group of media artists, engineers and theorists. Since then its activity continued inside and outside the country producing works, exhibiting, and holding symposia to discuss issues about art, technology, and culture. The project started with recognition of certain elements that are often observed in Japanese media art such as importance of physical devices; interest in technology itself; and playful feature. Japanese cultural tradition such as appreciation of refined tools and materials (as in tea ceremony), "culture of play" since medieval age, and positive attitude toward technology may have helped these elements to surface. Unbound to the Western art history, they offer an alternative viewpoint to examine what media art is about, and what artists could do. In media art, an original interface often represents the concept. In Device Art "[t]he Device itself is content. The mechanism represents the theme of the piece. Content and tool are no longer separable" to site the project leader Hiroo Iwata. The choice of word "Device" is deliberate. Today we are surrounded by digital devices and gadgets – consumer products provided by the industry. What if artists create their own artistic devices (which may look playful to invite interaction) as a commentary to the "media" society? Such artworks could be brought outside white cubes, offering opportunities for people to experience and think what media technology means to us, and how it has been changing our world view. Device Art explores new ways of thinking and practice in media art. The simultaneous waves of Device Art in other parts of the globe shows the concept was needed, and will help understanding media art.

The selection of device art from artists who graduated from the Design Media Arts MFA program at UCLA, reflects the variety and ambiguity of the notion. Each artist offers his/her own interpretation, while opening the field for questions and further elaborations. One of the basic issues is the notion of art in a capitalist society. Does the art object have to be an investment for the wealthy? Could it be a special kind of object for anyone to afford, collect and enjoy? Is device art for use or, rather, for commenting, often with humor, on the idea of the usable object? Could device art be made by anyone with standard software and hardware tools? The last question is tackled by Jaehyuck Bae with his work Inside Out. Using computer software and a 3D printer, he has created a series of small motorized machines, a play of motion and shadows. Device artists could offer such works for sale in the form of model kits, to be constructed and perhaps even printed in 3D by the buyer. The latest manifestation of Scott Hessel's Sustainable Cinema series, Lenticular Bicycle, raises the issue of use vs. uselessness, while also evoking ecology, recycling, cross-cultural communication, and the social life of objects. The work is a dense concentration of timely ideas for serious (but fun) reflection. Lauren McCarthy's Happiness Hat and Conversacube are concept objects, imagined devices that could help relieve social tensions and ease awkward face-to-face encounters. Eric Siu makes a leap from his own concept object, A Couple of Irons, to actually realizing them. TOUCHY is not only an original creation, but a centerpiece for the artist's cultural critique about the discontents of contemporary media culture.

Ten years ago, in 2004, the Kontejner bureau of contemporary art praxis curatorial team from Zagreb devised a new international triennial art project, Device\_art, presenting works stemming from creative tendencies that by their very nature are located on the borders of art-design, gadget-hack, etc. The same year in Tokyo saw the completely independent initiation of a project serendipitously also named device art, different however in concept and in artistic and cultural background. Five years later, the two device art scenes met at a joint exhibition, since which we have developed a fruitful pattern of collaboration. Device Art Japan, our sibling project and loyal partner in various artistic endeavours, offered us the exciting opportunity to take part in their presentation at Ars Electronica, thus marking our joint anniversaries. Our local scene tends to be characterized by a conceptual rather than a mechanical or design-oriented approach. Hacking and re-use of technology are emphasised, and the ironic and even absurd characteristics of the works are played up. The examples of Device\_art shown here feature some of these elements. The project Tateye by Anselmo Tumpić provides the capacity to alter one's eyesight by tattooing the retina with laser eyeglasses. If it were feasible, it would produce the uncommon result of looking permanently at the world through a single design. Sanela Jahić works with an image that constantly emerges and then vanishes, in the kinetic object Pendulum. Breath is a source of creativity in Martina Mezak's Urania, where a virtual sky can be filled with clouds by someone blowing into the device. The issues of poverty and the overproduction of technological waste are mediated in the Beggar of Sašo Sedlaček, which is built from obsolete but still functional technology. Possibly, the artistic vision embodied by the Device\_art works presented here will become your guide to eventful experiences!